



# California Legislative Black Caucus

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For Immediate Release  
October 14, 2008

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## Living History - Allensworth Centennial Celebration

Thousands journeyed to Col. Allensworth State Historic Park last weekend by car, train and bus to participate in the Centennial Celebration of Allensworth, "the town that refused to die."

The festivities, organized by the Legislative Black Caucus, State Parks and the Friends of Allensworth, were a grand and fitting finale to a year of observances that was kicked off at the State Capitol in February with an unveiling of an exhibit commissioned by Senator Ridley-Thomas, Chairman of the Caucus. That exhibit, "Allensworth: 100 Years of the California Dream," has traveled up and down the state and will continue to do so through 2009.

"I couldn't have been more gratified and thankful when I saw the throngs spread out on the grounds of Allensworth, basking in the sun and giving homage to those brave African Americans, just out of slavery, who dared to have a vision of self-determination and dignity and the courage to carry it out," said Senator Ridley-Thomas, who gave a rousing speech at the event.

"Allensworth is a story that must continue to be told," the Senator went on to say. "I am sure that those who attended the Centennial Celebration, on the same grounds where these men and women worked to build their own community, will ensure that we never forget the legacy and the accomplishments of these early California pioneers."

Attending and speaking at the festivities, in addition to the Senator, were five members of the Legislative Black Caucus: Assemblymembers Curren Price, Amina Carter, Mike Davis, Sandre Swanson and Assembly Speaker Karen Bass.

They were joined by State Parks Director Ruth Coleman, Senator Dean Florez, and Chairman of the Tulare County Supervisors Connie Conway.

Sharing the story and explaining the significance of Allensworth were historians Lonnie G. Bunch III, founding director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture; Rick Moss, director of the African American Museum and Library at Oakland; and, Susan Anderson, historian and curator of the Allensworth exhibit "Allensworth: 100 Years of the California Dream."

Also attending the festivities were Ms. Josephine Blodgett-Smith, Allensworth descendent and granddaughter of Lieutenant Colonel Allen and Josephine Allensworth; Mrs. Alice Royal, born in Allensworth and author of the book, "Allensworth, The Freedom Colony;" Gemelia Hall Herring, at 100, the oldest living pioneer of Allensworth; and, Barbara Jones, descendent of the Allensworth family.

Entertainment was provided by the Crenshaw High School Elite Choir, step performances and African drumming. There were tours of the restored buildings and hands-on educational opportunities as well as a variety of food and artifact vendors. Actor William A. Young, of CSI Miami, was the Master of Ceremonies.

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